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THE STATES-ITEM

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The States-Item prints the news impartially. It supports what it believes to be right. It opposes what it believes to be wrong, without regard to party politics.

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New respect for law

There is talk of dissolving the Justice Department's Organized Crime Strike Force in New Orleans, along with 17 similar units operating in other cities. The effectiveness of the special federal crime-busting unit is being questioned in Washington.

We believe there exists today in Louisiana new respect for the law on the part of public servants and businessmen. That respect was sadly missing a few years ago.

Part of the credit must go to the work of the Strike Force. Other factors include some hard working Republican U.S. attorneys with no favors to curry among local Democratic officeholders, an aggressive new attitude in the state attorney general's office, and a commendable impatience with political wheeling and dealing on the part of voters.

When Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison went free last week in a pinball bribery case, the Justice Department watched years of investigative work seemingly go for nothing.

This is not entirely true. The investigation did break up pinball gambling in the state. More than that, it applied enough political pressure to force a reluctant Legislature to approve antipinball legislation.

In the same manner, the U.S. attorney's investigation into the involvement of former state Attorney General Jack P.F. Gremillion and other state officials in the questionable operation of Louisiana Loan & Thrift did not result in the convictions originally sought.

But the case resulted in a new kind of state attorney general's office.

The action is not just in New Orleans. U.S. attorneys with jurisdiction over the Justice Department's Middle and Eastern Districts of Louisiana have their own investigations on the stove.

Political corruption has been a way of life in Louisiana for years. District attorneys have ignored abundant opportunities to prosecute and the state attorney general's office, before the election of William Guste, had led an equally passive existence.

One of the basic problems in Louisiana is the absence of a strong two party system. There has been no tough contingent of political "outs" to monitor and broadcast the transgressions of those in power.

Some forces have evolved to fill that vacuum and the federal Organized Crime Strike Force has been one of them. In Louisiana, at least, we believe that the unit has earned its keep.